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ABSTRACT

The Coppin Critical Reading Project at Coppin State College, Maryland is designed to help undergraduate students to become critical readers across a wide range of disciplines through the introduction of significant texts into the general education curriculum, through analysis of these texts from the perspective of the humanities, and through related faculty development activities. To realize such program outcomes, the project director and eight faculty participants underwent two semesters of faculty development experiences, and integrated readings from several significant texts into eight targeted general education courses. Project activities were spread over five semesters as follows: Spring 1988, weekly seminars analyzing texts explicating major epistemological positions; Summer 1988, seminars analyzing specific texts focusing on argumentative structure, major themes/issues, and literary genres for the purpose of textual analyses; Fall 1988, weekly seminars to share challenges and outcomes of various implementation strategies; Spring 1989, make adjustments in syllabi, negotiate curriculum changes, participate in seminars on sharing strategies and insights, and conduct workshops for Coppin faculty; and Summer 1989, assess project accomplishments, get student reactions, and analyze feedback. Two appendices provide a schedule of internal activities for the summer of 1988 Coppin State College Critical Reading Project and a copy of the student evaluation form. (SM)

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COPPIN CRITICAL READING PROJECT

OF

COPPIN STATE COLLEGE
Baltimore, Maryland 21216

Project Funded by: National Endowment for the Humanities
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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

COPPIN CRITICAL READING PROJECT

Abstract

The Coppin Critical Reading Project is designed to help undergraduate students to become critical readers across a wide range of disciplines through the introduction of significant texts into the general education curriculum, through analysis of these texts from the perspective of the humanities, and through related faculty-development activities.

Introduction

This document details the perceived need for this project, critical assumptions underlying the project, a brief description of two faculty-development phases, a review of two phases during which significant texts are integrated into pilot sections of general education courses, and a final phase planned for evaluation and for sharing with the larger higher education community, as well as two appendices.

Background

As a public, urban, commuter institution, serving a high proportion of first-generation students, Coppin State College has long reflected considerable faculty concern about the relatively passive manner in which many students approach assigned reading, about the relatively uncritical attitude with which many students read, about their almost total reliance upon secondary survey texts within general education courses, and about their general, propensity to avoid all significant texts[1] unless specifically assigned.

In light of these concerns (also expressed by others within the higher education community), Coppin established in the fall of 1986, a faculty committee charged with developing a college-wide list of readings to be infused into the general education curriculum. Committee members soon recognized that they shared a number of previously unexpressed assumptions regarding underlying causes of the problem:

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[1]Significant texts are defined here as those which have literary merit, point to connections across disciplines, are representative, are accessible to non-specialists, illuminate important movements/systems of thought, and suggest a particular view of the human condition.

1) certain epistemological views of both student and faculty;
2) certain derivative behaviors of students and teachers; and
3) certain criteria for textbook selection.

The Coppin Committee on Reading Across the Curriculum held specifically that many undergraduates from economically-limited backgrounds have been socialized in ways which promote their uncritical acceptance of authority as the locus of all knowledge. Moreover, these students' purpose for most sustained reading appears to be either:

1) escapism from the harsh realities of daily life, or
2) the acquisition of a summary view of "the truth" as proclaimed by their accepted authorities (i.e., authors of assigned textbooks, teachers, provincial religious leaders, or "grassroots" political leaders).

The Reading Committee perceived Coppin students as reflecting this orientation toward knowledge-seeking to a significant degree. Not only do they enter college knowing little about influential systems of world thought, but they also tend to perceive of knowledge as an already identified, fixed and eternal entity to be merely assimilated and respected, but not to be interacted with, challenged, or modified. Often it appears that the students' sole criterion for judging the validity of a claim is the assumed orthodoxy of the source.

The Reading Committee likewise concluded that such students tend to execute their reading assignments by a word-to-word or sentence-to-sentence progression, rather than by the identification, analysis, and evaluation of whole arguments or even of paragraphs.

Description of the Project

Considering critical reading to be a function both of the affective and the cognitive domains, and believing our students need help in both, the Chairperson of the Coppin Committee on Reading Across the Curriculum sought and received funding from the National Endowment For the Humanities in order to implement the Coppin Critical Reading Project.

It is the purpose of this project to help Coppin State College lower-division students become interactive, critical, and proficient readers of several significant texts across the curriculum. In order to realize such program outcomes, the project

director and eight faculty participants agreed to undergo two semesters of faculty development experiences, and subsequently to integrate readings from several significant texts into eight targeted general education courses (World History, U.S. History, General Psychology, World Literature, Introduction to Philosophy, Introduction to Physical Science, Introduction to Biological Science, and Speech Communication).

Project activities are spread over five academic semesters, as follows:

Spring 1988 - The project participants met weekly for three-hour seminars, where the focus was upon the analysis of several texts which explicate one or more of the major-epistemological positions which tend to undergird the major claims, arguments, methodologies of various disciplines in the liberal arts and sciences. Among such texts are: Irving Copi's Introduction to Logic, Stephen Toulmin's An Introduction to Reasoning, Hegel's Logic, Thomas Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Michel Foucault's The Order of Things, and his The Archaeology of Knowledge.

Each project participant made an oral presentation designed to incorporate, his/her understanding of salient claims from one or more of these texts into their own discipline or area of specialization. The goal was for faculty participants to enhance their own critical thinking skills, to become more aware of the dynamic and often cataclysmic nature of knowledge-building within and across the various disciplines, and to become more metacognitive of those teaching behaviors which inadvertently reinforce their students' dysfunctional views of knowledge as fixed or static.

Summer 1988 - Twice a week seminar sessions were scheduled for additional faculty development for project faculty from June 2 - July 12. During this project phase, the participants read and analyzed ten of the significant texts selected for ultimate integration into targeted general education courses. One session each week was led by a faculty participant, while the other lecture/discussion session was led by one of six visiting lecturers available also to consult with interested faculty regarding additional source materials, and regarding the relative efficacy of alternative pedagogical strategies.

Among foci for the textual analyses were:

1) **argumentative structure;**
2) **major themes/issues;**
3) **epistemological presuppositions;**
4) **literary genres/styles;**
5) **hypotheses regarding the human condition;**
6) **cross-disciplinary connections;**

7) historical, geo-political, or cultural contexts; and
8) public policy implications.

See **Appendix A** for the full Summer 1988 schedule and for the list of project texts and consultants.

Fall 1988 - In addition to attempting to incorporate the newly developed objectives related to one or more selected texts into pilot sections of targeted general education courses, the project faculty continued meeting in a weekly seminar designed for the sharing of challenges and outcomes of their various implementation strategies. The faculty participants also began the development of related test items (both essay and multiple choice), the latter developed with assistance from Dr. Catherine Nelson of Educational Testing Services. The test-item writing went more slowly than project participants had anticipated. There was general consensus by the end of the semester that considerable time is required to develop items following nationally standardized formats, spanning various taxonomic levels, and eliciting higher-order thinking skills. Most project faculty expressed the intention to rely more heavily upon essay questions and upon other major performance measures than upon multiple choice test items in the future.

During the Fall 1988 phase of the project, several project faculty began to have second thoughts about some of the particular texts which they had selected for integration into a targeted general education course. In at least three instances, summer 1988 project consultants had also forewarned that some of the selected works might pose too many challenges and perhaps should be reconsidered. We had been advised, for example, that our lower division students could be expected to have less resonance with the concept of innate ideas in Locke's <u>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</u> (a selected text) than with his <u>Treatises in Government</u>, a major source of the underpinnings of our own Declaration of Independence. Other consultants had warned that Kant's <u>Critique of Pure Reason</u>, and Burke's <u>Rhetoric of Motives</u> were just too tedious for even most-well-prepared undergraduates, and that these texts introduced an overwhelming repertoire of unfamiliar concepts.

At the end of the Fall 1988 semester, the project faculty administered a survey form developed by the project director for assessing the actual modes of metacognition utilized and the modes of critical judgments made by our students during in-class silent reading of excerpted passages from selected texts. To review this survey form (which makes no assessment of the students' comprehension of content), **see Appendix B.** The outcomes of the fall 1988 administration of this survey form will be determined at the beginning of the spring 1989 semester.

Spring 1989 - Although this project phase has not yet begun, the project faculty will:

1) make adjustments, as needed, in syllabi of the targeted general education courses;

2) negotiate any curriculum changes which affected departments will need to have formalized by action of the College Curriculum Committee;

3) participate in twice a month seminars for the purpose of refining and sharing instructional strategies, assignment sheets, and insights regarding concepts having cross-disciplinary connections; and

4) conduct two workshops for the full Coppin faculty.

Summer 1989 - This final phase of this NEH-funded project will have the following foci:

1) an assessment of the extent to which project objectives were accomplished within allotted timelines;

2) the written reactions and course achievements of student enrolled in the spring 1989 pilot sections of targeted general education courses; and

3) an analysis of formal feedback received from participants in Spring 1989 workshops for the full faculty.

Also during this final project phase, project faculty will make written and oral progress reports regarding articles for submission to appropriate journals so that the parameters, methodologies, and outcomes of this project will be shared with the larger community of college and university faculty.

Note on Funding

With a grant of one hundred twenty-nine thousand, five hundred dollars ($129,500) from NEH, all project faculty received release time, as well as summer stipends. In addition, the grant provided for consultant honoraria and travel expenses, for the purchase of multiple copies of critical texts, for film rentals, and for related supplies.

Appendix A

COPPIN STATE COLLEGE
CRITICAL READING PROJECT

Schedule* of Internal Activities - Summer 1988

DATE	MORNING ACTIVITIES	AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES	LOCATION
Tuesday, June 1	Design Decisions for Revised Syllabi Preview of Texts for June 2nd	Individual Conferences	OCL 523
Tuesday, June 7	Review Extra-Textual Stimulus Materials Preview of Text for June 9th	Individual Conferences	OCL 523
Tuesday, June 14	Taxonomic Coding of Revised Objectives Preview of Text for June 16th	Individual Conferences	OCL 523
Tuesday, June 21	Design of In-Class Exercises/Activities Preview of Texts for June 23rd	Individual Conferences	OCL 523
Tuesday, June 28	Construction and Coding of Test Items Preview of Text for June 30th	Individual Conferences	OCL 523
Tuesday, July 5	Design of Outside Research Assignment(s) Preview of Texts for July 7th	Individual Conferences	OCL 523
Tuesday, July 12	Submission of Revised Syllabi for Fall 1988 Semester		OCL 509

*Morning activities begin promptly at 9:30 a.m., with a lunch break from 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. In alternate weeks, there will be individual thirty-minute conferences scheduled for Group X participants (Daley, Hutchins, Satish, and Ogonji), and Group Y participants (Khorana, Morton, Krishnan, and Khorana). Other conferences may be arranged as needed. This Project is funded by the National Endowment For the Humanities.

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CRITICAL READING PROJECT

Consultant Schedule (NEH-Funded) - Summer 1988

DATE	TEXTS	CONSULTANT	ROOM	TIME*
Thur., June 2	W.E.B. DuBois. The Souls of Black Folks John Locke. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding	Dr. Edward Hudlin DuBois Center Harvard University	Parren Mitchell	9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Thur., June 9	Eric Fromm. Escape From Freedom	Dr. James Bayton Howard University	Tawes Conf. Room	9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Thur., June 16	Thomas Kuhn. Structure of Scientific Revolution	Dr. Andrew Stevenson Morgan State University	Tawes Conf. Room	9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Thur., June 23	Carl Jung. Man and His Symbols Sophocles. Antigone Ramayana	Ms. Jean Hinson Lall Washington Society for Jungian Psychology	Tawes Conf. Room	9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Thur., June 30	Immanuel Kant. Critique of Pure Reason	Prof. Richard Wilson Towson State University	Tawes Conf. Room	9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Thur., July 7	Kenneth Burke. Rhetoric of Motives Aristotle. Rhetoric	Dr. Don Burks Purdue University	Parren Mitchell	9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

*The consultants will work with the entire group of project participants on Thursdays from 9:30 a.m. through a light lunch (to end around 1:15 p.m.). On Thursday afternoon, each consultant will work exclusively with the Project Director and those faculty participants from the particular discipline which is the focus for the day.

Appendix B
NEH-Funded Coppin Critical Reading Project

STUDENT EVALUATION OF EXCERPT FROM A CRITICAL TEXT

Name _____

Social Security Number _____

Author of Excerpted Passage _____

Date _____

Your response to the survey questions below should be based upon your reading and evaluation of the attached passage, excerpted from a critical text related to the subject matter of this course.

Your responses will assist the instructor to determine the extent to which the text itself, your method of reading it, and the objectives of this course tend to match.

Scan the survey questions before initially reading the attached excerpt. Then return to the questions in order to give your responses in the spaces provided. Remember that no two readers will necessarily perceive a text in exactly the same way.

Survey Questions

I. List three to five questions which were raised in your mind as the result of your reading the attached excerpt. Read a second time if necessary.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

II. Decide whether the author attempted to answer any of the three to five questions on your list. Put a plus sign (+) in the left margin next to any of your questions for which the author did attempt to provide an answer. Put a zero (o) in the left margin next to any of your questions which the author failed to address.

III. If you do not accept the author's answer to any one of the questions included above on your list, rewrite one such question below, and then summarize in your own words, the author's answer.

My question: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

The author's answer: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

IV. Use a check mark ( ) to indicated all of your reasons for disagreeing with the author:

_____ answer has immoral consequences.
_____ answer not consistent with previously known facts
_____ answer not consistent with other claims by this author
_____ author provides no supporting evidence
_____ author provides too little supporting evidence
_____ author's reasoning is circular
_____ author's use of key terms is not stable or consistent
_____ author's sources of evidence are bias or untrustworthy
_____ other (please specify): _____
_____
_____

V. In a well developed paragraph, explain the steps to be taken by a conscientious reader who rejects an author's claim for any one or more of the reasons listed in item IV above.

VI. List below, five **key** terms (words or phrases) which are used by the author in the attached excerpt. Then use a check mark ( ) to categorize each of these terms as either neutral, positive, or negative.

	neutral	positive	negative
1. _____			
2. _____			
3. _____			
4. _____			
5. _____			

VII. In the space below, record verbatim the **most** difficult or awkward sentence which you encountered in the attached excerpt.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

VIII. In the space below, check ( ) all of the variables which you perceive as contributing to the difficulty or awkwardness of the sentence which you recorded in response to item VII.

_____ too many unfamiliar terms
_____ sentence too long
_____ too many phrase or clause modifiers
_____ long or unclear introductory (subordinate) clause
_____ two or more inconsistent meanings assigned by the author to a single term
_____ too many abstract (as opposed to concrete) terms
_____ non-conventional punctuation
_____ run-on sentence, with too many ideas linked
_____ too much technical jargon
_____ other reasons (specify): _____
_____